Pete Smith [redacted] January 29, 1996

Dear Pete:

It was very stimulating to talk to you following your letter of January 20, 1996.

The Nagy tidbits were helpful and I have followed up with a letter to the Federal Records Center in St. Louis which has both Federal non-military employees and personal military records. A copy is enclosed. Their records go back to the late 19th century only.

I want to find out what relationship by blood or marriage there really was between Haseltine and Nagy. Since Haseltine was the son in law of William Idler the fact that Haseltine and Nagy did business jointly indicates closeness. Maybe the New Jersey cemetery where Nagy is buried has a clue as to who is next to Nagy.

Thank you for your nice remarks about the Good Samaritan monograph. If I worried about prompt readership I would have stopped writing long ago. When something one writes gets cited in an article years later then it seems worthwhile, but when you don't get cited and something you wrote gets plagiarized then you know you have readership. I wrote an article on Shakespeare and couldn't get it published for years because someone had lifted my data from someone I had asked to check my article in its development stage.

I like your Smith of Ann Street article. Was he the ghost of Dr. Edwards?

I didn't realize you collected numismatic literature, but am glad to know it.

Keep writing.

Sincerely,
Eric P. Newman

Revised

Pete - if you have any questions about this letter from Eric Newman, please contact Barbara Gregory.

Letter to the Editor of The Numismatist

To be charged with misleading e generation of numismatic researchers is quite a surprise. What an influence to have! If true, what a shame, what a dishonor. That is an accusation which was leveled against two of us when the article entitled "Untangling the Tale of the Midnight Minter" by Pete Smith was published in The Numismatist for September 1997.

That article seems to endorse the procedure, 'First the hanging, then the trial and acquittal'.

The opening two paregraphs of the Smith article are as follows:

"Theodore Eckfeldt stands accused of using equipment belonging to the United Stetes Mint to strike coins for sale to collectors. Among the rarities attributed to him is the unique 'plain edge' 1804 dollar. For his alleged clandestine activities, he has been dubbed the 'Midnight Minter'."

"Since 1962, writers have besed their conclusions with respect to the identity of the surraptitious minter on evidence presented by Eric P. Newman and Kenneth E. Bressett in their book The Fantastic 1804 Dollar. The authors were careful to differentiate between fact and speculation, but unfortunately, like many legends, the Eckfeldt story has been retold as fact. It is time to retire the story, for it has led a generation of researchers in the wrong direction."

The Smith article does not include any quotation whatever from The Fantastic 1804 Dollar or from any subsequent publications by either of its authors, Eric P. Newman and Kenneth E. Bressett. The matters criticized by Smith as being inaccurate are that Theodore Eckfeldt participated in the production of Class II plain edge 1804 dollar coinage at the U.S. Mint and that he was the person referred to by the expression "Midnight Minter." Nothing in The Fantastic 1804 Dollar or subsequent writings by its authors even hints at Theodore Eckfeldt having enything to do with the production of any coinage at the U.S. Mint or elsewhere or Theodore Eckfeldt being referred to as the "Midnight Minter" or as a night watchman. What was seid in The Fantastic 1804 Dollar was that Theodore Eckfeldt circa 1858 sold plain edge Class II 1804 dollars, based upon reports by S. K. Harzfeld in 1880 and by Ebenezer L. Mason in 1882, - Harzfeld referring to Theodore as "an erring son" in the Eckfeldt family and Mason referring to Theodore es "young Eckfeldt", neither source actually using the name Theodore.

If Pete Smith was contesting only what others may have written he should not have included Newman and Bressett.

Numismatists still have an extremely fine (Condition 45) or better sense of humor. The coining of the phrase "Midnight Minter" by Richard E. Snow ebout 1990 obviously seems to be a comic alliteration using Eastern standard time but lacking a date. Theodore Eckfeldt who is also targeted as the "night watchman" by Don Taxay may heve gotten hot under the collar to press for work

rathar than sit on his reversa, laave a blank impression and ba a dia hard. Yat, rather than being a bust, ha could have gone on strike in order to get a haad. To Cater to his 'baautiful cousin, Cinderella Eckfaldt', he may hava wished to paddle a naw pair of plain adga, aize 18-04, silver mules befora midnight for her to wear at tha haraldic princa's ball, - as the fairy tail goes.

There is an illustration of the obversa of an 1804 dollar in tha Smith articla accompaniad by the caption:

"Twantiath century writars have accused Theodore Eckfeldt of peddling 1804 dollars in Philadalphia." That commant failed to add at its and "repeating what nineteenth century numismatists had experienced and racorded."

In tha Smith article it can be noticed that twalve paragraphs aftar his initial volley ha properly summarizes The Fantastic 1804 Dollar commants in the following mannar:

"Newman and Bressatt concluded that the dollars wera struck by Gaorge Eckfeldt and that Theodore was tha "arring son" since George's other son, John, was in San Francisco at the time."

Then Smith ands his article by concluding:

"The bast currant theory is that George Eckfaldt struck the "plain edga" 1804 dollars with tha possible approval of highar Mint officials. No night watchman was involvad and thera was no Midnight Minter."

Having come to the foregoing conclusion Smith seams to agrae completaly with what was assertad on the subject in The Fantastic 1804 Dollar and has only negatad items others may have writtan. For him to first criticize part of tha text of publishad material without even quoting it and than to agree in hie own summary with what that published taxt stated is bewildering.

Tha quastion remains:
Is this "libel" to be re-Petad ?

Eric P. Nawman

P.S. I hopa my long lost friend, Don Taxay, will come out of hiding and answar for himself concarning what ha wrota in 1966 (not 1983). Richard E. Snow might wish to comment, but will not do a Snow job. Above all Pate Smith should keep resaarching and writing.

Revised 9-22-97